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'Tough-minded' CIA will emerge from its trials, Colby says

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Washington—In a subjective mood, the outgoing director of central intelligence judged yesterday that, on balance, his agency will emerge intact and thriving from its current trials.

"Yes, we have been hurt," said William E. Colby about the Central Intelligence Agency. Some agents had "turned in their suits" as a result of the current investigations into the agency and disclosures of its activities and misdeeds. Some sources appeared to be withholding information. Some international businesses were refusing to let themselves be used as cover.

But people who go into intelligence are "tough-minded," Mr. Colby said at a breakfast

with reporters. If the agency emerges with better guidelines, with some operations but no sources exposed, "then we'll be in pretty good shape."

President Ford announced last week he was replacing Mr. Colby, a career intelligence man, with George Bush, now head of the United States mission in China, as part of a sweeping reorganization of the national security structure. Mr. Colby said it came as no surprise, and indeed many analysts have viewed Mr. Colby as a sacrificial offering almost from the time he took over the agency in 1973.

It was not a happy time for a CIA man to reach the pinnacle. For it was the time of the Watergate coverup disclosures, in

which the agency played a minor but culpable role.

In the months since, investigations have shown CIA surveillance of Americans at home—a clear violation of mandate—secret opening of mail, poor analytical judgments, assassination plots abroad. Through it all Mr. Colby, slight, deceptively mild in appearance, has guided the agency with a steadiness and met its critics with an apparent candor that impressed even the critics.

No, he was not surprised that Mr. Ford now was ready for a change, though he will remain in charge until Mr. Bush is confirmed. "I anticipated the change for a long time, and so did the agency," he said.

He confirmed reports that

Mr. Ford had offered him the ambassadorship to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But after talking it over with his wife he turned it down. The NATO governments would have received him calmly, he said, but "there would have been demonstrations."

Would he write a book? "I don't know yet," he said. Then he paused thoughtfully and reached for candor: "I may write a book. It's likely, yeah."

Whatever Mr. Colby writes, it will not be a tell-all performance. Mr. Colby's public performance has been so forthcoming, and his appearance so unlike that of the fictional agent, that many forget his

background. Among other things, he headed the Phoenix program in Vietnam, which included assassination of Viet Cong leaders. When he returned to Washington it was as head of the CIA's Directorate for Covert Operations.

Now, Mr. Colby tries to the deeper meaning of what is happening through the investigations of the intelligence system.

"We are bringing intelligence into our constitutional system," he says, as a result of Watergate. Earlier, he mused, ambassadors and politicians had said in effect, "I don't want to know about it."

It is difficult to resolve the need for secrecy with the constitutional system, he said, "but I believe we can do it with the proper guidelines." He described the "whole subject of leaks" as a "major problem."

Among other changes, Mr. Colby said he hoped Congress would enact legislation to hold intelligence workers to their oaths of secrecy. As for journalists, he said, they would be free to seek information—but intelligence people would suffer for revealing secrets.

He hoped, he said, that Senator Frank Church (D., Idaho) and his investigating subcommittee would not lay bare cover-ups. But, he added, he didn't expect it to.